

Community Development Annual Report

2023



Strategic Initiatives

On August 10, 2021, the Common Council passed a resolution acknowledging the Administration’s 2021-2023 Strategic Initiatives Report.

These initiatives are guided by the City’s Strategic Plan and identified priorities. The identified priorities include:

- Connected Community
- Economic Vitality
- Ensuring Financial Stability
- Quality Municipal Services

Community Development Strategic Initiative Projects

Economic Development

- Customer Relations Management Software (CRM)
- Shovel ready sites

Planning/Zoning/Inspections

- Comprehensive Plan update
- Outdoor Recreation Plan update
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan update
- Roll out code enforcement changes
- Permitting/code enforcement software research

Engineering

- North Interceptor project
- North Water Tower Project
- North Loop Utilities Project
- Radio Road Watermain Project
- WisDOT Wasson Lane design
- WisDOT Cemetery Rd
- WisDOT Powell Avenue bridge design
- Troy/Pomeroy watermain construction
- North Interceptor Sewer Lining Project – On Hold
- Mann Valley preliminary design

City Vision, Mission, and Values

Our Vision

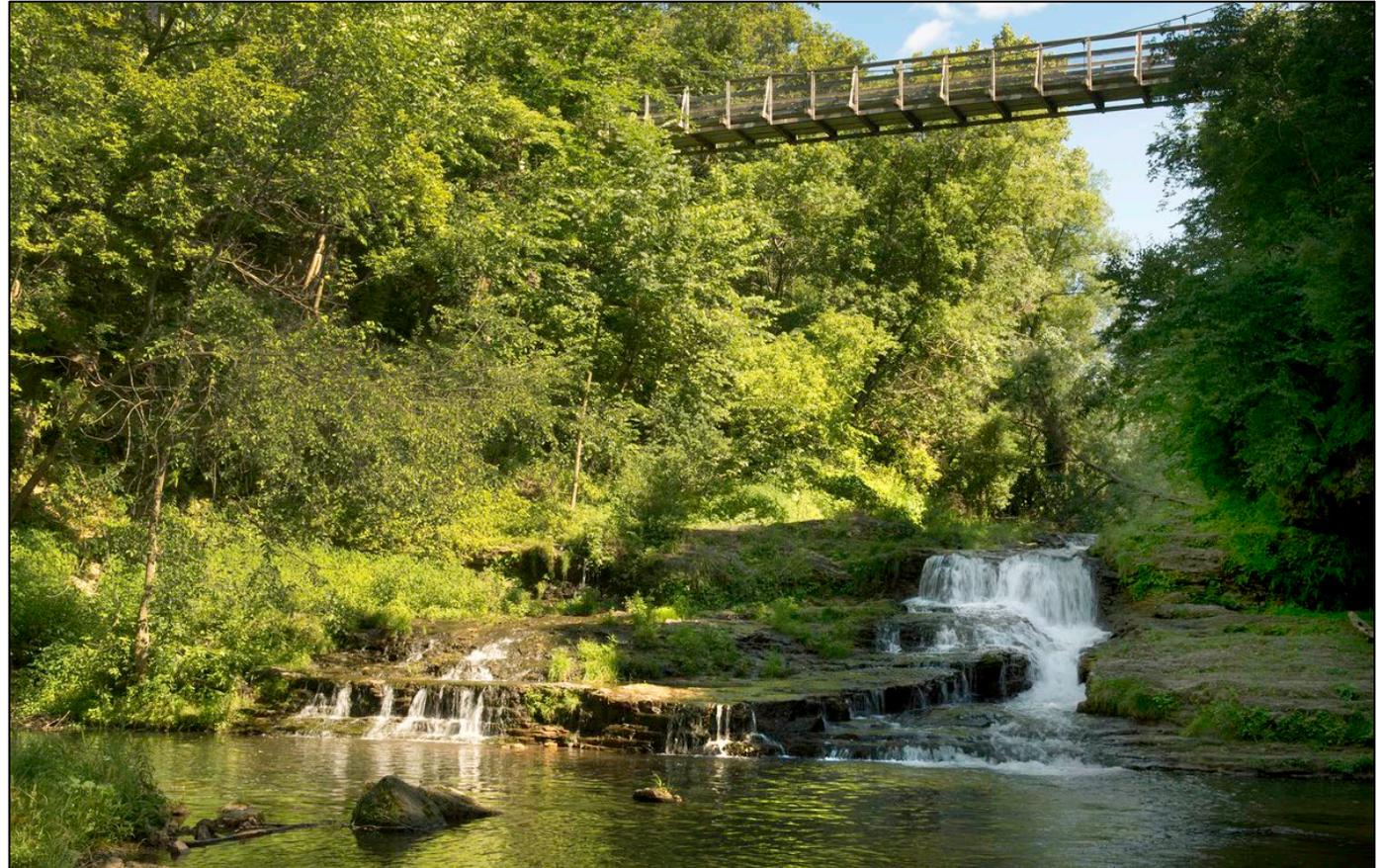
A distinct, vibrant, and safe community with an abundance of nature and easy access to metropolitan amenities. A place where families, students, and businesses flourish.

Our Mission

To coordinate and deliver essential services and ensure a sustainable future

Our Values

- Put People First
- Pursue excellence
- Act with integrity
- Embrace change
- Serve our community
- Consider future generations



Message from our Director

Dear Friends,

I am delighted to present the annual report on the efforts of our community development team, which reflect the collective dedication and progress we've achieved over the past year. As the Director of Community Development, it's been an inspiring journey working alongside our passionate team, city residents and community partners. This report encapsulates **our mission to guide future growth and development of the City while preserving and enhancing current city assets and promoting a sustainable future.** These stories, projects, and initiatives have shaped our shared growth and strengthened the bonds that make River Falls what it is today. In 2023 the City Council adopted the Focus River Falls plans which includes the Comprehensive Plan that will guide city growth for the next 10+ years. We appreciate the community members that supported the creation of these documents, and we hope you'll continue to support the implementation efforts as well. Together, we have tackled challenges, celebrated successes, and laid the groundwork for an even brighter future. I invite you to delve into the pages ahead, where you'll find a detailed account of our endeavors, the impact we've made, and the exciting path that lies ahead for our community. Thank you for being an essential part of this journey.



Your support and engagement make all the difference.

Amy Peterson, Community Development Director

Mann Valley Corporate Park

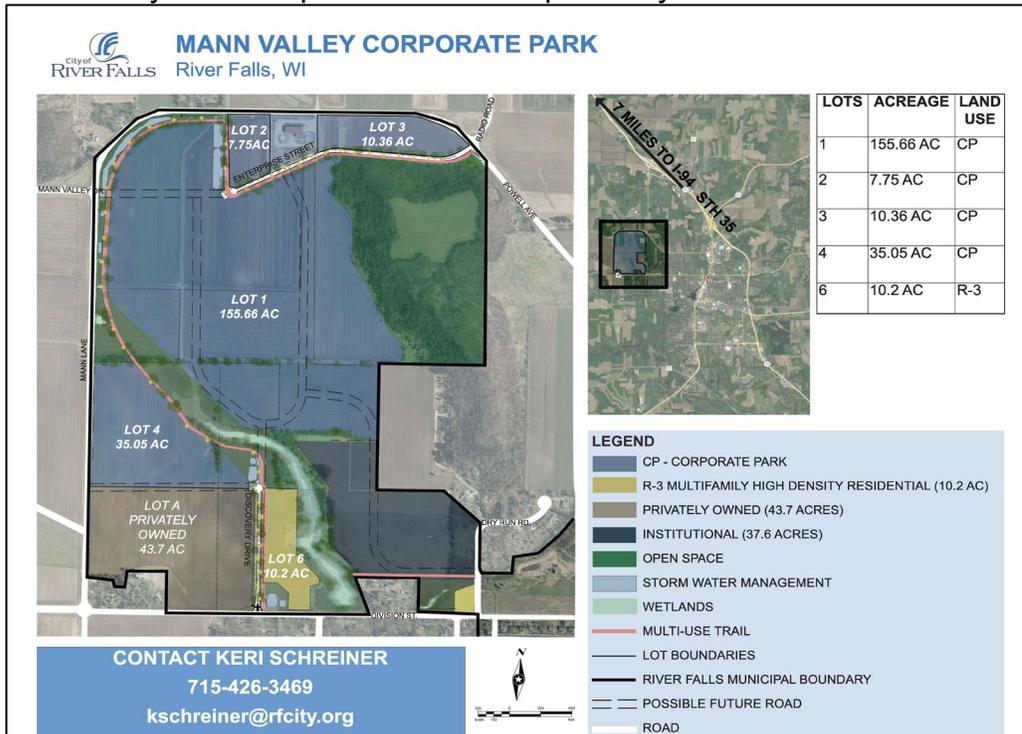
Twelve years after purchasing the property, on May 23, 2023, the City Council awarded the Mann Valley Corporate Park Phase I construction to Haas Sons, Inc., Phase I engineering services to SEH, Inc., and approved the creation of [Tax Incremental District No. 19](#), transferred jurisdictional transfer of a portion of County Trunk Highway U and Radio Road from St. Croix County to the City, and approved a purchase agreement for property required for Mann Valley construction.

On Tuesday, September 19, 2023, the City of River Falls celebrated the groundbreaking of Mann Valley Corporate Park. Infrastructure construction is underway and is expected to be completed by October 2024.



Located on the northwest side of the city, the park includes over 200 developable acres. At approximately 160 acres, the largest lot is one the most sizable tracts of land in the Twin Cities metro area. Mann Valley Corporate Park will be the fourth and largest corporate park in city limits. The first, River Falls Industrial Park, was established in 1989, followed by Whitetail Corporate Park in 2000 and Sterling Ponds Corporate Park in 2014.

The site's concept plan includes approximately 208 acres for light industrial and manufacturing use, 10 acres of multi-family high density residential development, 37.5 acres for institutional use (owned by the School District of River Falls), and 63 acres for conservancy. The plan also includes possible areas for mixed-use development, including commercial and/or medium to high-density residential and low-density residential.



Water Tower and North Loop Utility Extension

The City constructed a 500,000-gallon water tower in Whitetail Ridge Corporate Park. The project included a water main extension to connect the tower to the City's water system. The North Tower enhances system reliability in Whitetail Ridge and Sterling Ponds. It will also provide water availability for new development in the Mann Valley Corporate Park.

A multipurpose trail was constructed concurrently with the water utility extension and starts on the west side of Paulson Road at Prairie Drive, near the police station, and extends north to Radio Road. From there, pedestrians and cyclists can continue east on the existing off-road paved trail over State Highway 35 and continue into Sterling Ponds. Construction of the trail was included as an action item in the City's Bike and Pedestrian Plan to help address gaps in the city's pedestrian and bicycle network, especially along key corridors and routes that serve areas of higher population density.



Comprehensive Plan

Launched in 2021, Focus River Falls was an 18-month process to update three critical city planning documents: the [Comprehensive Plan](#), [Outdoor Recreation Plan](#), and [Bike and Pedestrian Plan](#). City staff, in partnership with SRF Consulting, worked closely with community members to develop a shared vision for the City's future.

On March 28, 2023, the City Council voted to adopt the three plans, which now serve as living documents to help the City build a better-connected community with enhanced livability. Staff is already busy laying the groundwork for implementation actions over the next several years.

6 Goals from the Plan

Connection

River Falls is a welcoming community that incorporates equity and inclusion into decision making, thereby creating opportunities for everyone to connect and thrive.

Livability

River Falls supports livability through intentional growth management policies and development standards, quality and diverse housing stock and local businesses that together support a strong connection to place.

Access

River Falls has accessible transportation infrastructure for people to safely, sustainably, and efficiently move throughout the city and in the region using varied modes of transport.

Partnerships

River Falls has mutually beneficial relationships with the community, organizations, educational institutions, and state/regional agencies.

Resources

River Falls prioritizes natural and cultural resources and outdoor recreation to increase opportunities that support healthy lifestyles.

Resiliency

River Falls has a resilient system of infrastructure, community facilities, and utilities that ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the community and preserve quality of life for future generations.

Powell Avenue Bridge

The project began in August and included total replacement of the existing concrete bridge deck, or surface of the bridge. The previous deck was constructed in 1973 and reached the end of its useful life. The City was awarded a grant from the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) to fund the majority of project costs, at approximately \$1.1 million dollars. WisDOT managed the Powell Avenue Bridge construction project, including overseeing the bidding process and contractor selection.

Formerly known as County Highway MM, the road and bridge were maintained by the county until 2019, when the City assumed jurisdiction and renamed the road Powell Avenue. Due to the age of the bridge, the City needed to make significant repairs, but funding was initially an obstacle.

“The hurdles to even begin the construction phase of this project were numerous,” said Todd Nickleski, city engineer. “It took several years to secure grant funding, prepare a design, and work with adjacent property owners. We knew this was going to be challenging to complete in 2023 due to a nearby bald eagle’s nest, which restricted work until after July 30. We are very pleased with WisDOT and the contractor, Larson Construction Company, for their big push to complete this project before winter and keep us on track with our timeline.”



Council members left to right: Scott Morrissette, Todd Bjerstedt, Diane Odeen, Sean Downing, Jeff Bjork

Kinni Corridor

Early in 2023 the City of River Falls signed a Federal Cost Share Agreement with the United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to study both the cost and environmental benefits of restoring the Kinnickinnic River to its natural setting by removing one or both hydroelectric dams. Upon signing this agreement, the City and the USACE entered into a Feasibility Study process. Recommendations from the completed study will be presented to City Council in 2024. Should the City agree to move forward with the project, Federal funding of up to \$10 million would be available for removal of one or both dams. The City and USACE held an open house in August to connect with the community about the process and collect feedback. The USACE is currently completing a waiver process with the Feasibility Study projected to be completed mid 2024.

PARTNERSHIP WITH U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS ADVANCES KINNI CORRIDOR PLAN IMPLEMENTATION

The City Council adopted the Kinnickinnic River Corridor Plan in 2018 to set a future vision for the Kinni River Corridor that meets residents' needs and desires, reflects the values of the community, and protects the river for future generations. The two-year planning process was centered on community engagement, with residents' voices prioritized as the City Council considered the future direction of the river corridor.

Engagement results revealed that residents overwhelmingly desired a restored Kinnickinnic River that is better connected to the City's downtown, with enhanced opportunities for fishing, paddling, birding, biking, and hiking. The planning process culminated in a recommendation by the Kinni Corridor Project Committee, a steering committee comprised of community stakeholders, to remove both dams. It also called for the creation of a public-private partnership to bring the vision to life.



Year	Event
2016	Long-range planning process for the Kinni Corridor begins
2018	City Council adopts Kinni Corridor Plan and passes resolution to remove both dams
2019	Kinni Corridor Collaborative (KCC) is founded to lead fundraising and engagement efforts during plan implementation
2020	Lake Louise floods in June and is drained, revealing damage to Powell Dam
2021	City begins decommissioning process for Powell Falls
2022	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and City begin discussions about river restoration grant opportunity
2023	City and USACE partner to begin feasibility study

On February 27, 2018, the City Council passed a resolution calling for the removal of Powell Falls Dam by 2026 and Junction Falls Dam between 2035 and 2040. The City began work to identify a partnership that would aid in implementation of the plan, and Kinni Corridor Collaborative (KCC) was founded in 2019 to assist with fundraising and community engagement.

The City took a major stride toward plan implementation in 2022 when leaders and staff began conversations with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers about a river restoration grant opportunity of up to \$10 million. The Army Corps, a federal agency that provides public engineering services and funding, is preparing to begin a feasibility study on restoration of the Kinnickinnic River, a required step the agency must take before beginning a river restoration project. Once the study is complete, the Corps will provide a proposal to City Councilmembers, who will decide whether to move forward with a Corps-led dam removal project.

"Our partnership with the Army Corps presents an amazing opportunity to move us closer than we've ever been toward the community's vision of a free-flowing Kinnickinnic River."

Amy Peterson
Community Development Director and Kinni Corridor Project Manager



To find out more about the history of this project, see the [Kinni Corridor Website](#)

Housing

In 2022, the City contracted with Maxfield Research and Consulting to update the Comprehensive Housing Needs Analysis for the community that was originally completed in 2017. The Community Development Department is working to support housing developments to address the gaps found across all housing types.

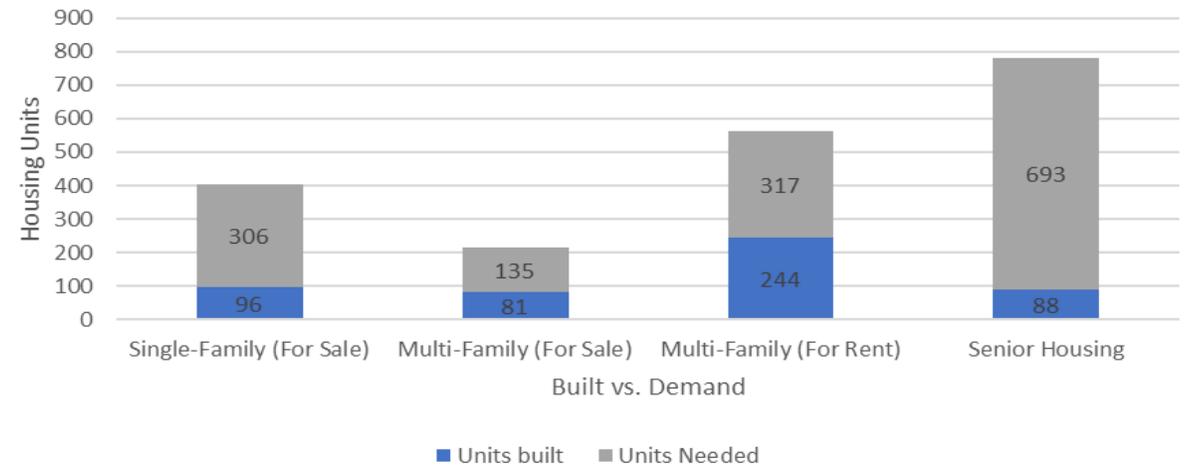
The Building Inspection department issued 119 Certificates of Occupancy for new housing including: Lake George Lofts, Highview Meadows, Dawes Place, The Sycamore, and Wasson Lane Townhomes

Two recently approved multi-family projects include affordable housing units with assistance from the City:

- Lake George Lofts:
 - Six studio or one-bedroom units for households that earn 80% or less of the area median income for Pierce County
 - Two two-bedroom units for households earning 50% or less of the area median income for Pierce County
- The Uplands:
 - One studio apartment with a balcony for households that earn 80% or less of the area median income for St. Croix County
 - Two one-bedroom units without balconies for households earning 50% or less of the area median income for St. Croix County



Housing Units Needed by 2030



Commercial and Industrial Developments

In addition to the major public projects completed in 2023, these private-sector projects began in 2023 with the support of the Community Development Team.



Our Economic Development Manager, Keri Schreiner, works to connect businesses to available locations in the city. If you are looking to expand or relocate, reach out to [Keri](mailto:kschreiner@rfcity.org) at kschreiner@rfcity.org

DUNKIN DONUTS

Opened in a newly renovated building on N. Main street

SWINGING BRIDGE

Expanded into an adjacent storefront on Main Street downtown

BLOOMS FOR HAPPINESS

Relocated to a larger space on the north end of the city

BOH ELECTRONICS

Finished construction and began operations in a new building in Whitetail Ridge Corporate Park

LOCKTIGHT STORAGE

Began construction on over 400 units of self-storage at radio road

STARBUCKS

Began construction on a redevelopment site on N. Main street

108,000 SQUARE FOOT MULTI-TENANT INDUSTRIAL BUILDING

Under construction in the Sterling Ponds Corporate Park

Permits and Code Enforcement

Planning and Zoning Permits	2023
Home Occupation	1
Special use permits	1
Variance	0
Rezoning	1
Annexation requests	3
Annexation acres (total)	72.3
Certified survey maps	8
Preliminary/Final plat	3
Planned Unit Development	4
Development Review	4
Sign Permits	26
Fence Permits	34

The code enforcement, building, and inspections teams provide a wide range of support to residents in the safety and permitting of projects.

In 2023 the City’s Building Inspector completed 2,243 inspections ranging from decking, new homes, internal finishings, and inspects all projects for safety and code compliance.

The code enforcement team worked on 249 cases which include nuisances, erosion control inspections, and code compliance throughout the City.

Alternative Funding Sources

\$775,000+ grant dollars won

With a growing City, we have a lot of projects we want to accomplish in the Community Development Department, and we want to do it in a financially responsible way. That's why the Community Development Department strategically and effectively wrote various grant applications to help fund the necessary projects that keep our city healthy.



- UNPS Grant to update TP modeling for TMDL compliance, update the Stormwater Utility program, and model the potential for TP removal through street sweeping of leaves.
- Rural Business Development Grant
- AARP Community Challenge Grant to make improvements to the Main and Division intersection for bike and pedestrian safety
- Wisconsin DNR's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Grant for the Mann Valley trail
- Federal Emergency Management Agency Grant for planning project to perform a flood study in the Hoffman Basin watershed area
- USDOT Safe Streets for All Grant

Boards and Commissions

Community Development Staff over sees eight citizen-led Boards/Commissions for the City of River Falls. These are opportunities for residents to get involved with the planning, beautification, and preservation of River Falls. Boards include City Board of Appeals, Downtown Design Review Committee, Historic Preservation Commission (HPC), Business Improvement District (BID), Plan Commission, Extra Territorial Zoning Committee (ETZ), Extra Territorial Board of Appeals, and River Falls Economic Development Corporation.

These citizen boards contributed over 500 hours of service in 2023!

Highlights

- BID Board awarded \$14,532.55 in grants to five businesses to improve signage and facades in the downtown area
- Plan Commission recommended approval of 391 units of housing
- ETZ approved a rezoning and special use permit in the Town of River Falls
- HPC presented a long-running gallery at the Library about the businesspeople of early River Falls history



Community Partners

We know that there are many groups who are simultaneously working to improve the community here in River Falls and the Community Development Department is happy to partner with them on various projects.

- St. Croix Valley Innovation Center
- Kinni Corridor Collaborative
- Membership in Rain to Rivers
- St. Croix Valley Bird Club
- Prairie Enthusiasts
- University of Wisconsin River Falls
- Chippewa Valley Technical College
- River Falls School District
- Wisconsin State Department Of Transportation
- Town of Clifton
- Town of River Falls
- River Falls Economic Development Corporation
- St. Croix Economic Development Corporation
- Pierce County Economic Development Corporation
- Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation
- Momentum West



The Team

The Community Development Department works to support and guides future growth and development through effective planning, zoning, permitting, enforcement, and maintain and promote sustainability by taking care of the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability to meet the needs of future generations.



Left to right: Todd Nickleski, Ellen Massey, Chris Buntjer, Keri Schreiner, Amy Peterson, Harley Mehlhorn, Tamarra Jaworski, Tyler Galde, David Hovel, Emily Shively, Angie Bond, Adam Martinson

We appreciate you taking the time to read about our successful 2023.

Thank you for your continued participation and support in the intentional growth of our River Falls!